

## The Prize and the Prize Girl



By Jonathan Brooks

S AID Monty Sawyer in the clubhouse: "I tell you, fellows, we've got to hit. Or quit tryin' to win games, see? We've got to hit 'at old apple'."

"Whaddya mean, 'at old apple'?" growled Jack Jones, big roughneck first baseman. Jocko had smashed out three solid blows.

"Yeah," Liz Cochran, the catcher, horned in. "Sing yourself a solo, kid. Don't try to make it extra. Liz had treated himself to a whistling three-bagger."

"Oh, I didn't notice you slugging whangin' out any hits when anybody was on base," Monty came back at the big fellows.

"Not our fault if nobody gets on, hey, Liz," Jocko Jones, guttural. "I can't hit behind runners when they ain't any runners."

"I was glad to hear the bunch start the razz. It was the best sign yet that I might be able to turn out a ball club for old time," said the Simmons, who'd bought the Blues with some jack he grabbed in the oil business.

"I'd picked up Monty Sawyer, a smart second baseman who could hit the size of his hat when he was lucky, and this big Jocko Jones, a rookie, for first. I had two good men for the box and nine others with perfect control—that is, they could put the ball anywhere the other guys could hit it. With this outfit I started the season, and it didn't look any too rosy."

Monty Sawyer was the pepper box in our menu, and he was a smart, tricky felder.

"I took us six weeks to dig ourselves into third place."

"My fool luck gave me an infield that is second to none. Nobody caught Waldo Blatt's act on third base, and Jersey Day can field and throw with an authority that ever lived."

"Then take this big gorilla, Jocko Jones. His fieldin' looked funny, but he did the job. And hit? Baby, how he could swing!"

"I left the pitchers to Liz Burton, and I stood pat on the three out-felders, O'Connell, Buck and Swarzhelmer, who were fair enough."

"Well, you boys have won two series and broken even in the other one," said old man Simmons to me at the end of the second week of the season, which we opened at home.

"You go on up to Chicago, and come back by way of Cincinnati, and hang on to fourth place, and I'll blow the bunch to an extra week's wages, see?"

"So I told the gang. They gave three cheers. Extra! Extra! Extra! pretty soft in the spring, when the boys have been through a hard winter with nothin' comin' in."

"We went away from home with the papers givin' us a big send-off. They printed the averages for the first two weeks, and man, they were a fright. Mostly zeros and ones. Down at the bottom of the list, with two zeros and a seven, was Monty Sawyer."

"Boy," I said on the train, "I certainly wish you'd get one safe once in a while."

"Mister Andrews," he came back at me. "I'm gonna hit. See? I've just been readin' about a book," he said. "It's got the idea in it."

"Never was a book could teach anybody how to hit anything," I said. "You'll see," he said.

"I saw. We got back home with five games out the eight in our bat bag, and fourth place still in our midst. The reason was Monty Sawyer did start hittin'. He got one safe in every game, and two in some of them. You never saw a guy get so cocky in all your life. And talk? In the field, at the bat, on the coaches' line, on the bench, and from every where, this guy barked and yelled like a pup with a thorn in his foot, but mostly at Jocko Jones. When he wasn't talkin' to somebody he talked to himself. Mutterin' and growlin' to himself all the time."

"I wish y'd lay off the big guy about hittin'." I said to him. "Let him have the razz in the field, for that keeps him on the jump. But nix on that stuff about his battin'."

"Why not?" asked Monty, peeved. "Have you looked at his average lately? He's picked up thirty-seven points since I started kiddin' him."

"In that case, shoot," I said. "The old man was good for the extra dough, and the guys felt pretty good. But I've noticed one thing, the old man said, 'and that is that only one of you boys is battin' the ball now who was not hittin' when you left home. I promised this bonus to see if you wouldn't all start battin' harder.'"

"They'll come around," I said. The worst time in the world to criticize a ball player is when he's not hittin' 'em safe."

"I'm talkin', Mister Andrews," said Mr. Simmons. "Now, then, I offer you all a bonus, and only one of you comes through. This time I'll offer you a bonus, and only one of you can come through. I'll pay \$500 to the man who can produce a scheme that will land us in third place. Nobody barred, not even the manager. I'll be the judge. On June first," said the old boy, "I'll come out here to the clubhouse. If we're in third place, ahead of the Gollaths, I'll

have \$500 in cash in my pocket. What do you say?"

"All I could do was to fall in line. I even made up my mind to try for that Jack myself."

"The old man had took a likin' to Monty Sawyer. He always got a laugh out of his line of talk. So he looked straight at Monty when he wound up his spiel."

"There's one boy on the team," he says, "who's really earned an extra \$500. I suggest you all see if you can't find out his secret and apply it to yourselves."

"Office hours, twelve to twelve," says Monty prompt. "Make your appointments with my secretary, gent."

"And we were off! I started in workin' on the three best rookie pitchers myself. But outside of that I never saw anything that looked like the winner of the old man's five hundred."

"ONE day Moran handed us a decision the crowd didn't like, but it was all right. To satisfy the fans I went down from the third-base coachin' line to ask Charlie whether he'd hit him, or something."

"Standin' on deck with three bats in his hands, was little Monty Sawyer. He was lookin' at Moran and sayin' something. I thought he was cussin' the ump, but that wasn't it. 'Little by little and bit by bit, I'm gettin' so that I can hit,' Monty growled."

"What's that?" I said, forgettin' about Moran's feat."

"Nothin'," said Monty, turnin' red. "You could do a jigstep to it," I said.

"Tell him about it, Bill," yelled the fans. So I went on over and asked Charlie how his family was. And the yellin' died out. I went back to third base. And all the time I was thinkin' about Monty Sawyer's poem, or song, or whatever it was. That night I tumbled. The kid had been buildin' up confidence in himself."

"Just like Ty Cobb," I figured. "Cobb's been good because he's believed he's good."

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"It's gettin' to be an epidemic," I said to myself, listenin' in on Otto. "I pick 'em slim, I pick 'em fat, I hit 'em with one old kind of a bat," says Otto.

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"None of your business," he said. "C'mon, tell me. I've got a date. Waitin' for a letter before I go."

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"I'll be sure to tell you both to cut it out," I said. "We can't have any skirrt chasers on this club. As long as we're in the business of winnin' ball games, we'll let the lizards win the ladies, see?"

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"Well, one of the ladies in the Simmons family said I might call," Jocko said.

"You're a liar!" Monty yells. And I had to grab Jocko.

"Listen, Monty," says Jocko, kinda slow, when I'd pushed him back on the bench. "Don't ever call me that again, see? If you do, I'll spank you. And I'll hurt."

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But that afternoon the old man showed up in his box and he had his wife and daughter with him. The girl's the kind that makes every guy which sees her decide to start savin' his money, and I figured I'd let Monty and Jocko fight it out any way they could. For the time bein'."

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"Can you beat it? Or even hit it?"

Not when I go on to tell you that this Skinny Buck proceeds up to lay a beautiful three-bagger out along the left-field foul line.

After supper that night Jocko wanted to know whether the Gollaths had more, or two left-handers. I told him no, and started to ask him if he knew anything about this thing of kiddin' yourself into the notion you're a hitter.

"No," he said. "That's something you can't kid yourself about. Either y'r a hitter, or y'r ain't. See? But I gotta beat it. Gotta date."

"Hope you get there before Monty does," I said, yellin' after him as he topped across the lobby; "and stay longer."

"I was pullin' for him against Monty in any race they might have for this girl. Not that I'd bet he could beat Monty out. He's smart, Monty is."

This club I'm calling the Gollaths has come through the west like a Kansas cyclone. They got high-priced ball players, special coaches, trainers, and assistant managers till who tied the pup and why, and any time they finish worse'n second, the owners call in the manager and hand him a million dollars to buy some batters with. And they've got a smart manager in this Jimmy McGonigle.

"A lotta folks has turned out to see us beat the Gollaths," says Mr. Simmons to me in the clubhouse before the first game of the big series. "Best attendance we've had this year, not exceptin' openin' day."

"Whaddya mean, beat the Gollaths?" I said. "We ain't done it yet."

"Oh, but we must," he says. "We can't disappoint the crowd. And, besides, I'm offerin' five hundred dollars to the first guy who can beat them to third base. And all the time I was thinkin' about Monty Sawyer's poem, or song, or whatever it was. That night I tumbled. The kid had been buildin' up confidence in himself."

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cause he don't call Jocko. The crowd gives 'em the razz, and we're off.

Up goes Waldo Blatt for us. He slices Nubbin's first ball over second for a bag. Nubbin gets worried, and looks at our bench. Jersey Day walks up, waits, and walks instead of sacrificin' as I'd told him. Along comes Irish O'Donnell, talkin' to himself. I know what he's sayin', though I can't hear it:

"Swingin' from the toes, or chop from the waist; they ain't any pitcher 'at I can't paste."

While he's walkin' up there, I hear "Sure."

"Oh, look who's here," hollers Jocko Jones, as we go out to take the field for the first round. He jerks his gloved hand at the left-hander Nubbin.

"You go jump in the lake, you big fish!" yells Nubbin.

"Save y'r breath for some pitchin'!" hollers Jocko, and tends to business, leavin' Nubbin swearin'.

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